

THE
NATURE AND DESIGN
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

Extracted from a late Author.

By the Rev^d. DAVID SIMPSON, M. A.

“ Why all this toil for triumphs of an hour?
“ What though we wade in wealth, or soar in fame?
“ Earth’s highest station ends in, ‘ *here he lies:*’
“ And ‘ *dust to dust*’ concludes her noblest song.”

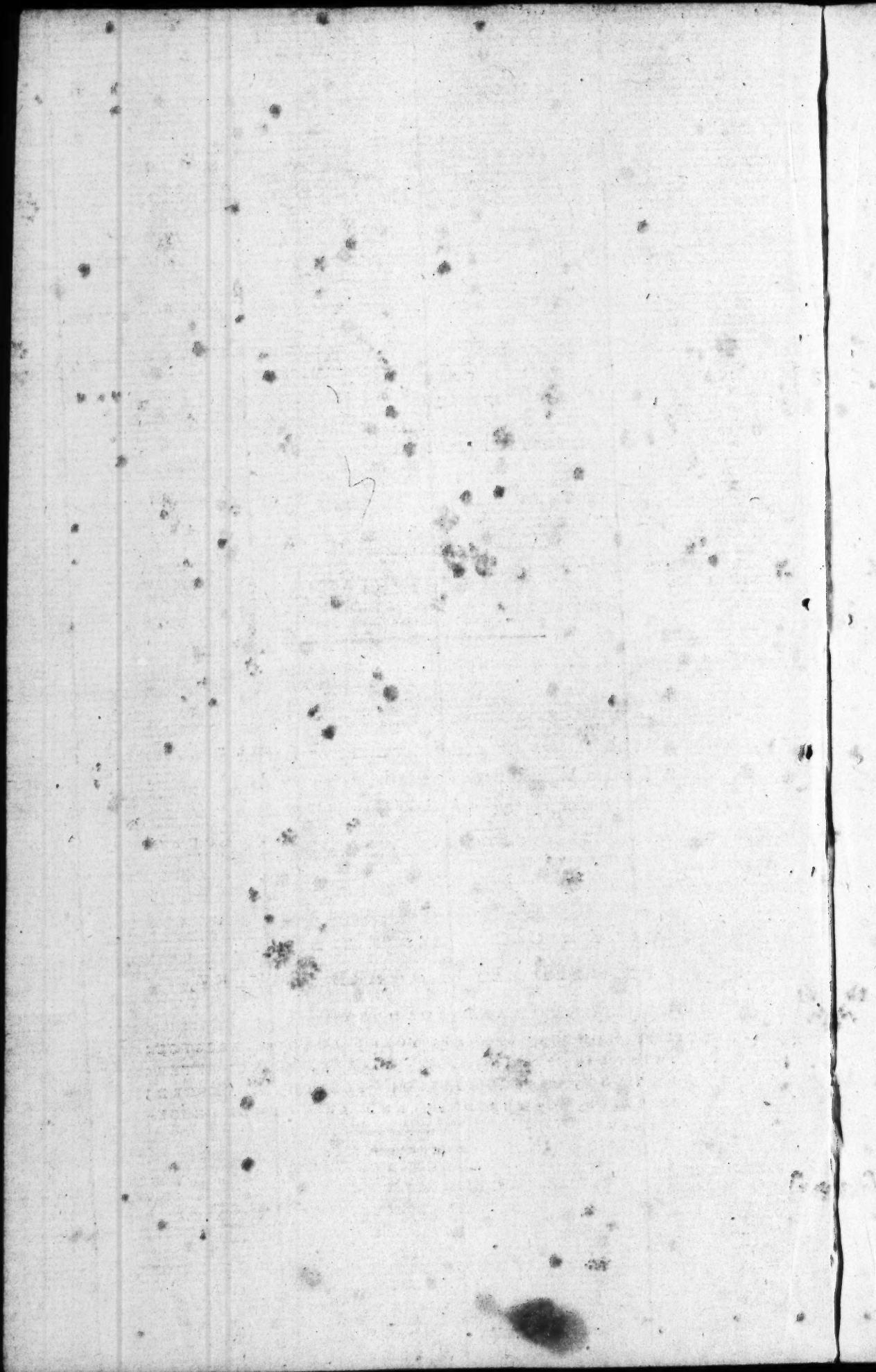
YOUNG.

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T H E

NATURE AND DESIGN, &c.

THE wisdom of mankind has for several ages been enquiring into the nature of man, and the nature of the world in which he is placed.

The wants and miseries of human nature, and the vanity of worldly enjoyments, have made it difficult for the wisest men to tell what human happiness was, or wherein it consisted.

It has pleased the infinite goodness of God, to satisfy all our wants and enquiries by a revelation made to the world by his son Jesus Christ.

This revelation has laid open the great secrets of providence from the creation of the world, explained the present state of things, and given man all the information that is necessary to quiet his anxieties, content him with his condition, and lead him safely to everlasting rest and happiness.

It is now only necessary, that the poor wisdom of man do not exalt itself against God, that

we suffer our eyes to be opened by him that made them, and our lives to be conducted by him, in whom *we live, move, and have our being.*

For light is now come into the world, if men are but willing to come out of darkness.

As happiness is the sole end of all our labours, so this divine revelation aims at nothing else.

It gives us right and satisfactory notions of ourselves, of our true good and real evil; it shews us the true state of our condition, both our vanity and excellence, our greatness and meanness, our felicity and misery.

Before this, man was a mere riddle to himself, and his condition full of darkness and perplexity. A restless inhabitant of a miserable disordered world, *walking in a vain shadow, and disquieting himself in vain.*

But this light has dispersed all the anxiety of his vain conjectures; it has brought him acquainted with God, and by adding heaven to earth, and eternity to time, has opened such a glorious view of things, as makes man even in his present condition, full of a peace of God which passeth all understanding.

This revelation acquaints us, that we have a spirit within us, that was created after the divine image, that this spirit is now in a fallen, corrupt condition, that the body in which it is placed, is its grave, or sepulchre, where it is enslaved to fleshly thoughts,
blinded

blinded with false notions of good and evil, and dead to all taste and relish of its true happiness.

It teaches us, that the world in which we live, is also in a disordered, irregular state, and cursed for the sake of man; that it is no longer the paradise that God made it, but the remains of a drowned world, full of marks of God's displeasure, and the sin of its inhabitants.

That it is a mere wilderness, a state of darkness, a vale of misery, where vice and madness, dreams and shadows, variously please, agitate, and torment the short, miserable lives of men.

Devils also, and evil spirits, have here their residence, promoting the works of darkness, and wandering up and down, seeking whom they may devour.

So that the condition of man in his natural state, seems to be, as if a person sick of variety of diseases, knowing neither his distempers, nor his cure, should be enclosed in some place, where he could hear, or see, or feel, or taste of nothing, but what tended to inflame his disorders.

The excellency therefore of the christian religion appears in this, that it puts an end to this state of things, blots out all the ideas of worldly wisdom, brings the world itself to ashes, and creates all a-new. It calls man from an animal life and earthly conversation, to be born again of the Holy Ghost, and be made a member of the kingdom of God.

It crushes into nothing the concerns of this life, condemns it as a state of vanity and darkness, and leads man to a happiness with God in the realms of light.

It proposes the purification of our souls, the enlivening us with the Divine Spirit; it sets before us new goods and evils, and forms us to a glorious participation of the divine nature.

This is the one sole end of christianity, to lead us from all thoughts of rest and repose here, to separate us from the world and worldly tempers, to deliver us from the folly of our passions, the slavery of our own natures, the power of evil spirits, and unite us to God, the true fountain of all real good. This is the mighty change which christianity aims at, to put us into a new state, reform our whole natures, purify our souls, and make them the inhabitants of heavenly and immortal bodies.

It does not leave us to grovel on in the desires of the flesh, to cast about for worldly happiness, and wander in darkness and exile from God, but prepares us for the true enjoyment of a divine life.

The manner by which it changes this whole state of things, and raises us to an union with God, is equally great and wonderful,

I am *the way, the truth, and the life*, saith our blessed Saviour, *no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*

As all things were at first created by the Son of God, and without him was *not any thing made that*

was

was made, so are all things again restored and redeemed by the same Divine person.

As nothing could come into being without him, so nothing can enter into a state of happiness or enjoyment of God, but by him.

The price and dignity of this redemption at once confounds the pride, and relieves the misery of man. How fallen must he be from God, how disordered and odious his nature, that should need so great a mediator to recommend his repentance!—And on the other hand, how full of comfort, that so high a method, so stupendous a means should be taken, to restore him to a state of peace and favour with God!

This is the true point of view in which every christian is to behold himself. He is to overlook the poor projects of human life, and consider himself as a creature through his natural corruption falling into a state of endless misery, but by the mercy of God redeemed to a condition of everlasting felicity.

All the precepts and doctrines of the gospel are founded on these two great truths, the deplorable corruption of human nature, and its new birth in Christ Jesus.

The one includes all the misery, the other all the happiness of man.

It is on these great doctrines, that the whole frame of christianity is built, forbidding only such things as fasten us to the disorders of sin, and commanding only those duties which lead us into the liberty and freedom of the sons of God.

The corruption of our nature makes mortification, self-denial, and the death of our bodies necessary. Because human nature must be thus unmade, flesh and blood must be thus changed, before it can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Our new birth makes the reception of God's Spirit, and the participation of the holy sacrament necessary; to form us to that life to which the resurrection of Jesus Christ has entitled us.

So that would we think, and act, and live like christians, we must act suitably to these terms of our condition, fearing and avoiding all the motions of our corrupted nature, cherishing the secret inspirations of the Holy Spirit, opening our minds for the reception of the divine light, and pressing after all the graces and perfections of our new birth.

We must behave ourselves conformably to this double capacity, we must fear, and watch, and pray, like men that are always in danger of eternal death, and we must believe and hope, labour and aspire, like christians, that are called to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life.

This knowledge of ourselves, makes human life a state of infinite importance, placed upon so dreadful a point betwixt two such eternities.

Well might our blessed Saviour say to one, that begged first to go and bury his father, *Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.*

For

For what is all the bustle and hurry of the world, but dead shew, and its greatest agents, but dead men, when compared with that state of greatness, that real life, to which the followers of Christ are redeemed?

Had we been made only for this world, worldly wisdom had been our highest wisdom; but seeing christianity has redeemed us to a contrary state, since all its goods are in opposition to this life, worldly wisdom is now our greatest foolishness.

It is now our only wisdom to understand our new state aright, to let its goods and evils take possession of our hearts, and conduct ourselves by the principles of our redemption.

The nature and terms of our christian calling is of that concern, as to deserve all our thoughts, and is indeed only to be perceived by great seriousness and attention of mind.

The christian state is an invisible life in the Spirit of God, supported not by sensible goods, but the spiritual graces of faith and hope; so that the natural man, especially while busied in earthly cares and enjoyments, easily forgets that great and heavenly condition in which religion places him.

The changes which christianity maketh in the present state of things, are all invisible; its goods and evils, its dignities and advantages, which are the only true standards of all our actions, and are not subject to the knowledge of our senses.

In

In God we live, and move, and have our being, but how unseen, how unfelt is all this!

Christ is the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the end of all things. The whole creation subsists in him and by him; nothing is in any order, nor any person in any favour with God but by this great mediator. But how invisible, how unknown to all our senses, is this state of things!

The apostle tells us, that we christians are *come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God; to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, &c.* (a)

But our senses see or feel nothing of this state of glory, they only shew us a society amongst vain and worldly men, labouring and contending for the poor enjoyments of a vain world.

We are temples of the Holy Ghost, consecrated to God, members of Christ's mystical body, of his flesh and of his bones, receiving life, spirit, and motion from him our head.

But our senses see no farther than our parents and kindred according to the flesh, and fix our hearts to earthly friendships and relations.

Religion

(a) Heb. xii. 22.

Religion turns our whole life into a sacrifice to God, a state of probation, from whence we must *all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, &c.* (b)

But our senses, the maxims of this life, and the spirit of the world, teach quite another turn of mind; to enjoy the good things of life as our portion, to seek after riches and honours, and to dread nothing so much as poverty, disgrace, and persecution. Well may this life be deemed a state of darkness, since it thus clouds and covers all the true appearances of things, and keeps our minds insensible, and unaffected with matters of such infinite moment.

We must observe, that in scripture christianity is constantly represented to us, as a redemption from the slavery and corruption of our nature, and a raising us to a nearer enjoyment of the divine glory.

It knows of no misery, but the death and misery which sin has made, nor of any happiness, but the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, which form us to a greater likeness of God.

Thus saith the apostle, *Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* (c)

He was manifested to take away our sins. (d)

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this evil world.

The same scriptures teach us, that as we are redeemed from this state of sin, so we are raised to a
new

(b) 2 Cor. v. 9.

(c) Tit. ii. 13.

(d) 1 Joh. iii. v.

new life in Christ, to a participation of the divine nature, and a fellowship with him in glory.

Thus our blessed Saviour prayeth for all his followers, *that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.* (e)

Happy he that hath ears to hear, and a heart to feel the majesty and glory of this description of our new life in Christ!

For surely could we understand what our Saviour conceived, when he sent up this prayer to God, our hearts would be always praying, and our souls ever aspiring after this state of perfection, this union with Christ in God.

To proceed; *In my Father's house, saith Christ, are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also.* (f)

The apostle tells us, that *as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.* (g)

And that when Christ, *who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.* (h)

Beloved, saith St. John, *now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear, what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* (i) I

(e) Joh. xvii. 21 (f) Joh. xiv. 23. (g) 1 Cor. xv.

(h) Col. iii. 4. (i) 1 Joh. iii. 2.

I cannot leave this passage, without adding the apostle's conclusion to it: *And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

Which teaches this lesson, that no man, whatever he may think of his christian improvement, can be said to have this hope in him, unless he shews it by such a purification of himself, as may resemble the purity of Christ.—But to return.

St. Paul thus breaks forth into the praises of God; *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. (k)* And again, *God who is rich in mercy; for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; and he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (l)*

These passages teach us, that christianity introduceth us into a new state, made up of invisible goods, and spiritual blessings, that it so alters our condition, as to give us a new rank and degree even in this life; which the apostle expresses by making us *sit together in heavenly places.*

So that though we are still in the flesh, yet, as the apostle saith, need we know no man after the flesh; though we are still inhabitants of this vale of misery, yet are we ranked and placed in a certain order amongst heavenly beings in Christ Jesus.

Would

(k) Ephes. i. 3.

(l) Ephes. ii. 4. 5.

Would we therefore know our true rank and condition, and what place we belong to, in the order of beings, we must search after a *life that is hid with Christ in God*. We must consider ourselves as parts of Christ's mystical body, and as members of a kingdom of heaven. In vain do we consider the beauty and strength of our bodies, our alliances with men, the privileges of birth, and the distinctions of this world, for these things no more constitute the state of human life, than rich coffins or beautiful monuments, constitute the state of the dead.

We justly pity the last poor efforts of human greatness, when we see a breathless carcass lying in state. It appears to us to be so far from any real honour, that it rather looks like ridiculing the misery of our nature. But were religion to form our judgment, the life of a proud, voluptuous and sensual man, tho' shining in all the splendor of the world, would give us no higher an idea of human dignity, than that of a poor corpse laid in state.

For a sinner, when glorying in *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*, shews us a more shocking sight of misery ridiculed, than any pageantry that can expose the dead.

We have an apostle's authority to say, *that he who liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth*.

This shews us, that when we enquire what our life is, or wherein it consists, we must think of something higher than the vigor of our blood, the gaiety
of

of our spirits, or the enjoyment of sensible pleasures; since these, though the allowed signs of living men, are often undeniable proofs of dead christians.

When therefore we would truly know what our life, our state, our dignity, our good, or our evil is, we must look at nothing that is temporal, worldly, or sensible. We may as well dig in the earth for wisdom, as look at flesh and blood, to see what we are, or at worldly enjoyments, to find what we want, or at temporal evils, to see what we have to fear.

Our blessed Saviour put an absolute end to all enquiries of this kind, when he said, *be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. (a)*

Here our bodies and all bodily enjoyments are at one dash struck out of the account of happiness, and the present state of things made so very low, and insignificant, that he who can only deprive us of them, has not power enough to deserve our fear.

We must therefore, if we would conceive our true state, our real good and evil, look farther than the dim eyes of flesh can carry our views, we must, with the eyes of faith, penetrate into the invisible world, the world of spirits, and consider our order and condition amongst them, a world which (as *St. John* speaks) *has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the light of the Lamb.* For it is there, amongst eternal beings,

(a) Luke, xii. 4.

beings, that we must take an eternal fellowship, or fall into a kingdom of darkness and everlasting misery.

Christianity is so divine in its nature, so noble in its ends, so extensive in its views, that it has no less subjects than these, to entertain our thoughts.

It buries our bodies, burns the present world, triumphs over death, by a general resurrection, and opens all into an eternal state.

It never considers us in any other respect, than as fallen spirits; it disregards the distinctions of human society, and proposes nothing to our fears, but eternal misery, nor any thing to our hopes, but an endless enjoyment of the divine nature.

This is the great and important condition in which christianity has placed us; above our bodies, above the world, above death, to be present at the dissolution of all things, to see the earth in flames, and the heavens wrapt up like a scrawl, to stand at the general resurrection, to appear at the universal judgment, and to live forever, when all that our eyes have seen, is passed away and gone.

Take upon thee, therefore, a spirit and temper suitable to this greatness of thy condition; remember that thou art an eternal spirit, that thou art for a few months and years in a state of flesh and blood, only to try whether thou shalt be forever happy with God, or fall into everlasting misery with the devil.

Thou wilt often hear of other concerns, and other greatness in this world; thou wilt see every order of
men,

men, every family, every person pursuing some fancied happiness of his own, as if the world had not only happiness, but a particular kind of happiness for all its inhabitants.

But when thou seest this state of human life, fancy that thou sawest all the world asleep, the prince no longer a prince, the beggar no longer begging, but every man sleeping out of his proper state, some happy, others tormented, and all changing their condition as fast as one foolish dream could succeed another.

When thou hast seen this, thou hast seen all that the world awake can do for thee; if thou wilt, thou mayst go to sleep for a while, thou mayst lie down and dream; for, be as happy as the world can make thee, all is but sleeping and dreaming, and what is still worse, it is like sleeping in a ship when thou shouldst be pumping out the water; or dreaming thou art a prince, when thou shouldst be redeeming thyself from slavery.

Now this is no imaginary flight of a melancholy fancy, that too much exceeds the nature of things, but a sober reflection justly suited to the vanity of worldly enjoyments.

For if the doctrines of christianity are true, if thou art that creature, that fallen spirit, that immortal nature, which religion teaches us, if thou art to meet death, resurrection, and judgment, as the forerunners of an eternal state, what are all the little flashes of

B

pleasure

pleasure, the changing appearances of worldly felicity, but so many sorts of dreams?

How canst thou talk of the happiness of riches, the advantages of fortune, the pleasures of apparel, of state, and equipage, without being in a dream?

Is the beggar asleep, when he fancies he is building himself fine houses? Is the prisoner in a dream, when he imagines himself in open fields, and fine groves? And canst thou think, that thy immortal spirit is awake, whilst it is delighting itself in the shadows and bubbles of worldly happiness?

For if it be true, that man is upon his trial, if the trial is for eternity, if life is but a vapour, what is there that deserves a serious thought, but how to get well out of the world, and make it a right passage to our eternal state?

How can we prove that we are awake, that our eyes are open, but by seeing, and feeling, and living according to these important circumstances of our life?

If a man should endeavour to please thee, with fine descriptions of the riches, and pleasures, and dignities, of the world in the moon, adding that its air is always serene, and its seasons always pleasant, wouldest thou not think it a sufficient answer, to say, I am not to live there?

When thy own false heart is endeavouring to please itself with worldly expectations, the joy of this or that way of life, is it not as good a reproof, to say to thyself, I am not to stay here? For

For where is the difference betwixt an earthly happiness, from which thou art to be separated forever, and a happiness in the moon, to which thou art never to go? Thou art to be forever separated from the earth, thou art to be eternal, when the earth itself is lost, is it not therefore the same vanity to project for happiness on earth, as to propose a happiness in the moon? For as thou art never to go to the one, so thou art to be eternally separated from the other.

Indeed the littleness and insignificancy of the boasted honours of human life, appears sufficiently from the things themselves, without comparing them to the subjects of religion.

For see what they are in themselves.

Ahasuerus, that great prince of the eastern world, puts a question to Haman, his chief minister of state, and asks him, *What shall be done unto the man, whom the king delighteth to honour? (a)*

Haman imagining that he was the person whom the king had in his thoughts, answered in these words:

Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal, whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and

B 2

proclaim

(a) Esther vi. 6.

proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour!

Here you see the sum total of worldly honours.

An ambitious Haman cannot think of any thing greater to ask; Ahasuerus, the greatest monarch in the world, has nothing greater to give to his greatest favourite; powerful as he is, he can only give such honours as these.

Yet it is to be observed, that if a poor nurse was to please her child, she must talk to it in the same language, she must please it with the same fine things, and gratify its pride with honours of the same kind.

Yet these are the mighty things, for which men forget God, forget their immortality, forget the difference betwixt an eternity in heaven, and an eternity in hell.

There needs no great understanding, no mighty depth of thought, to see through the vanity of all worldly enjoyments; do but talk of them, and you will be forced to talk of gewgaws, of ribbons, and feathers.

Every man sees the littleness of all sorts of honours, but those which he is looking after himself.

A private English gentleman, that is half distracted till he has got some little distinction, does at the same time despise the highest honours of other countries, and would not leave his own condition, to possess the ridiculous greatness of an Indian king. He sees the vanity and falseness of their honours, but forgets that

that all honour placed in external things, is equally vain and false.

He does not consider, that the difference of greatness is only the difference of flowers and feathers; and that they who are dressing themselves with beads, have as just a taste of what adorns their persons, as they who place the same pride in diamonds.

When we read of an eastern prince, that is too great to feed himself, and thinks it a piece of grandeur to have other people put his meat into his mouth, we despise the folly of his pride.

But might we not as well despise the folly of their pride, who are ashamed to use their legs, and think it adds to their state, to be removed from one place to another by other people.

For he that thinks it stately to be carried, and mean to walk on foot, has as true notions of greatness, as he who is too haughty to put his meat into his own mouth.

Again, it is the manner of some countries in the burial of their dead, to put a staff, and shoes, and money, in the sepulchre along with the corpse.

We justly censure the folly and ignorance of such a poor contrivance to assist the dead; but if we did but as truly understand what life is, we should see as much to ridicule in the poor contrivances to assist the living.

For how many things in life do people labour after, break their rest and peace to get, which yet when
gotten

gotten, are of as much real use to them, as a staff and shoes to a corpse under ground? They are always adding something to their life, which is only like adding another pair of shoes to a body in the grave.

Thou mayest hire more servants, new paint thy rooms, make more fine beds, eat out of plate, and put on richer apparel, and these will help thee to be happy, as golden staves, or painted shoes, will help a dead man to walk.

See here therefore the true nature of all worldly shew and figure, it will make us as great as those are, who are dreaming that they are kings, as rich as those who fancy that they have estates in the moon, and as happy as those, who are buried with staves in their hands.

Now this is not carrying matters too high, or imposing upon ourselves with any subtilties of reasoning, or sound of words; for the value of worldly riches and honours can no more be too much lessened, than the riches and greatness of the other life can be too much exalted. We don't cheat ourselves out of any real happiness, by looking upon all worldly honours as bubbles, any more than we cheat ourselves by securing honours that are solid and eternal.

There is no more happiness lost by not being great and rich, as those are amongst whom we live, than by not being dressed and adorned as they are, who live in China or Japan.

Thou

Thou art no happier for having painted cielings and marble walls in thy house, than if the same finery was in thy stables; if thou eatest upon plate, it maketh thee just as happy, as if thy horses wore silver shoes.

To disregard gold, jewels, and equipage, is no more running away from any real good, than if we only despised a feather or a garland of flowers.

So that he who condemns all the external shew and state of life as equally vain, is no more deceived, or carried to too high a contempt for the things of this life, than he that only condemns the vanity of the vainest things.

You don't think yourself imposed upon, or talked out of any real happiness, when you are persuaded not to be as vain and ambitious as Alexander.

And can you think that you are imposed upon, or drawn from any real good, by being persuaded to be as meek and lowly as the holy Jesus?

There is as much sober judgment, as sound sense in conforming to the fulness of Christ's humility, as in avoiding the height and extravagance of Alexander's vanity.

Don't therefore think to compound matters, or that it is enough to avoid the vanity of the vainest men. There is as much folly in seeking little as great honours; as great a mistake in needless expence upon thyself, as upon any thing else. Thou must not only be less vain and ambitious than an
Alexander

Alexander, but practise the humility of the blessed Jesus.

If thou remembereſt that the whole race of mankind are a race of fallen ſpirits, that paſs through this world as an arrow paſſes through the air, thou wilt ſoon perceive, that all things here are equally great and equally little, and that there is no wiſdom or happineſs, but in getting away to the beſt advantage.

If thou remembereſt that this life is but a vapor, that thou art in the body, only to be holy, humble, and heavenly-minded, that thou ſtandeſt upon the brink of death, reſurrection, and judgment, and that theſe great things will ſuddenly come upon thee, like a thief in the night, thou wilt ſee a vanity in all the gifts of fortune, greater than any words can expreſs.

Do but therefore know thyſelf, as religion has made thee known, do but ſee thyſelf in the light which Chriſt has brought into the world, and then thou wilt ſee that nothing concerns thee, but what concerns an everlaſting ſpirit that is going to God; and that there are no enjoyments here that are worth a thought, but ſuch as may make thee more perfect in thoſe holy tempers which will carry thee to heaven.

T H E E N D.

Mr Bayle 2

